John N. Miksic

Singapore & the Silk Road of the Sea, 1300–1800. Singapore: NUS/ National Museum of Singapore, 2013, ix + 491 pp. ISBN 9789971695743, price: US 65.00 (hardback); 9789971695583, 48.00 (paperback).

Tracing the ancient history of Singapore through archaeological, historical, and anthropological data obtained from more than forty years of careful investigations in the field, John Miksic's book shows that the idea that 'the past is a foreign country' is not always true. Miksic argues for the long history of Singapore, which began in the end of the thirteenth century, long before Thomas Stamford Raffles founded a British settlement on the island in 1819. In this pioneering work, Miksic places Singapore in the broad contexts of major Asian and European polities, revealing intriguing interactions between ancient Singaporeans and the Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, Khmer, Javanese, Malay, Indian, Arab, Portuguese, and English. He demonstrates that complex system of sea routes covering the Indian Ocean, the Java Sea, and the South China Sea was as influential on and essential for Pre-modern world trading systems as the famous overland Central Asiatic Silk Road, calling it 'the Silk Road of the Sea' (p. 1, *passim*).

The Introduction 'The Archaeology of Singapore: Forgotten Hints' contains a brief account of early British and Dutch archaeological finds and of the pretext that laid upon Raffles' decision to found a settlement on the island. The British governor wanted to restore an ancient port of Temasik-Singapore mentioned in the Malay Annals, or *Sejarah Melayu*, as the first major Malay city-port. Miksic argues that the Malay Annals are authentic concerning fourteenth century Singapore because their information has been confirmed by recent archaeological data. 'Historical Background' begins with prehistoric trade or exchange networks that covered 'the Three Seas of the Southern Ocean' (Chapter One). It shows the first steps of Chinese southern expansion under the Qin and Han dynasties, the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean connections to the beginning of the Common Era, and the rise and fall of the first Southeast Asian port of trade, or port-polity Funan in the Lower Mekong Delta. Chapter Two 'The Rise of the Island Empires' combines archaeological data from excavations in Sumatra, West Java, the Malaccan Peninsula, and from underwater shipwreck findings and tells about Srivijaya and its archrival Malayu-Jambi.

Chapter Three, 'From the Fall of Srivijaya to the Rise of Singapore', tells about the rise of the Song Dynasty in China and its trade activities in the southern seas. Miksic emphasises the significance of the attack by South Indian Chola king Rājendra Chola on Srivijaya in 1025 and supposes that '[I]t is likely that Srivijaya no longer existed after 1025' (p. 110). Roy Jordaan and Brian Colless have

objected to the idea of Srivijaya's prolonged hegemony in their monograph *The Mahārājas of the Isles* (2009: xviii, 285), which was unfortunately omitted in the bibliography. The chapter also contains an overview of several Sumatran sites Muara Takus, Barus, Kota Cina, and the thirteenth century Pulau Buaya, the Java Sea, and Houzhu shipwreck. Chapter Four, 'Singapore's Ancient History, 1299–1604', summarises the historical data on Singapore from the Malay Annals (*Sejarah Melayu* in Malay or *Sulālat-us-Salātīn* in Arabic), the Malay (Indonesian) Archipelago inscriptions, Portuguese writers Tomé Pires and Godinho de Erédia, and Chinese sources, including *Daoyi Zhilue*, or 'Description of the Barbarians of the Isles' by Wang Dayuan. Miksic shows a history of Singapore between the two fourteenth century empires, Javanese Majapahit and Siamese Ayutthaya, and the up-and-coming powers of the early fifteenth century, the Malacca Sultanate and the Ming China.

The next four chapters deal with recent archaeological finds in Singapore. The majority of finds date from the fourteenth century, the first peak of Singapore. The place remained inhabited during the following two centuries, but during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was almost completely abandoned and visited occasionally by the sea nomads *Orang Laut* from Riau. Chapter Five gives a detailed account of Singaporean geology and all excavations there, including sites in the Fort Canning, the Colombo Court, Old Parliament House, Empress Place, St. Andrews Cathedral, Parliament House, Singapore Cricket Club, and Bras Basah Park. The reader obtains valuable information on stratigraphy of all sites where it could be traced and residential transformations in the Fort Canning. Chapter Six concentrates on 'Products of Ancient Singapore'. It includes artifacts that could be or were produced by ancient inhabitants of the island: earthenware pottery made by a traditional Malay 'paddle-and-anvil' technology, small bronze or copper and gold objects, as well as tortoise shell (p. 286, fig. 6.19). Chapter Seven concerns 'Singaporean Imports of the Fourteenth–Sixteenth Centuries'. Its main subject is Chinese porcelain from Yuan and Ming China: green wares, white wares, copper-red wares, iron-spotted *qingbai* jars and covers, blue and white wares, and various stonewares. A few sections examine curious 'mercury wares' or 'small-mouth bottles'. Miksic concludes that '[t]hese jars were made for a special purpose, and later reused in many contexts' (p. 321). Chapter Eight goes 'Beyond Ceramics' and focuses on 'metal, coins and glassware' (p. 325). The archaeologists have found iron objects but due to Singaporean soil they all are damaged and to establish their functions seems impossible. A brass Chinese padlock was found in the Parliament House Complex (p. 329, fig. 8.01). Chinese coins unearthed in Singapore mostly belong to the Northern Song dynasty. Beads form the main part of glass artifacts.

The last part of the monograph places Singapore in a 'Regional Context'. Chapter Nine looks for 'Temasik's Partners in Java, Thailand, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and India' (p. 353). Burnished Javanese redware and the lead figurine of headless rider, fine paste ware and glazed ware sherds from Thailand, Vietnamese glazed ceramics, Sri Lankan coins, Indian glass bangles and stone beads, all point to a broad trade network of the fourteenth to sixteenth century Singapore. Chapter Ten concentrates on the history and archaeology of Riau. After the fall of Melaka, Riau was for the short time a capital of the last Melakan sultan, Mahmud. Until the arrival of Raffles, Singapore Island was in the sphere of influence of sea nomads, Orang laut, who based in the Riau Archipelago. Chapter Eleven brings together the data on 'Temasik Neighbours: Southeast Asian Settlements' to put fourteenth century Singapore in a broader context of regional urban patterns (p. 389). Chapter Twelve 'Singapore, Johor, Riau' returns to Raffles and his epoch and reconstructs the colonial past of the city. Miksic emphasises that archaeological excavations of the colonial period are insufficient and may give clues to many aspects of nineteenth century urban life.

The Conclusion, 'Ancient Singapore, Urbanism, and Commerce', summarises the data on fourteenth century Singapore. Miksic points out that Singapore's 'existence and appearance were determined by economic pursuits' and that it was a heterogeneous city, in the sense that 'change and development are favoured' there (pp. 440–1). He also emphasises that 'Singapore is the oldest known site where archaeology and history combine to confirm the existence of an overseas Chinese community' (p. 441). Several features of Singapore testify to its atypical urbanism. They include its earthen wall, its large proportion of imported items and, perhaps, 'unusually refined tastes' of its population (p. 442). Future investigations are required to clarify these and other aspects of Singapore's ancient history.

The monograph contains a few annoying inaccuracies. At the beginning of the first century CE there was no Mauryas in India but the Kushan Empire; there were not 'three great empires' (p. 32) but four: Rome, Parthia, Kushans, and Han. An unfortunate misprint occurs in the caption to the fig. 0.16: 'Boulder in West Java prepared for splitting; possibly fifth century, since it is near inscriptions of the kingdom of Taruma' (p. 15). But the boulder bears Sanskrit characters in the Brahmi script forming the Ciaruteun inscription of the king Purnavarman.

John Miksic's *Singapore & the Silk Road of the Sea, 1300–1800* is a must-have for anyone interested in history, archaeology, social and cultural anthropology of Singapore and Southeast Asia as a whole. It contains many insightful ideas supplemented by huge volume of historical and archaeological data as well as colour and black-and-white figures of artifacts, maps, and drawings. It views

Southeast Asian history as a whole and puts the local history of Singapore into regional and world contexts. It helps to understand how strong trade flows were long before Christopher Columbus came to the New World.

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Reference

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